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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2311
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RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHLN/AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG 4322
RUEHVK/AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK 2272
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 003602

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SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS ATTACKED

MOSCOW 00003602 001.2 OF 002

11. (SBU) Summary: On July 21, a group of fifteen thugs attacked the campsite of environmental activists in Angarsk, near Lake Baikal, killing one and wounding several others. The regional Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) has identified 13 suspects, and arrested at least two. The motives behind the attack are not clear at this point. End summary.

Pre-Dawn Attack

12. (U) On July 15, approximately twenty-two environmental activists established a camp near Angarsk, near Lake Baikal, to protest the establishment of an international uranium enrichment center. Local police reportedly visited the site on July 20 while investigating graffiti from Antifa, an anti-fascist organization whose members were participating in the protest camp. Since the police had no search warrants, the members of the camp reportedly refused to present their documents or allow the their belongings to be examined.

13. (U) Several hours later, a group of approximately fifteen masked thugs, armed with clubs and iron rods, arrived and beat the protesters, killing 26 year-old Ilya Bondarenko, and wounding several others. Igor Kozlov, a spokesman for the protesters, told us July 23 that the attackers had shouted nationalist and anti-Antifa slogans during the attack. Approximately thirty minutes later, police and an ambulance arrived. Bondarenko died in the hospital of a spinal cord and head injuries. Two other activists underwent operations and remain hospitalized in serious condition.

The Investigation

14. (U) Kozlov told us that the police took almost all of the campers' possessions as evidence, including their tents and clothes. He claimed that the police were downplaying the nationalist character of the attackers and had not summoned any of the activists to the local MVD headquarters to identify those arrested. The police are investigating the attack under Article 111 of the Russian Criminal Code (causing grievous bodily harm resulting in death) and Article 213 (hooliganism). These charges carry maximum sentences of fifteen and seven years, respectively. Valeriy Gribakin, the Irkutsk MVD Public Affairs Chief, reportedly said that "neither those arrested, nor the others identified have anything to do with (extremist) organizations." The acting

chief of the MVD in Irkutsk oblast told journalists that, "It is the mass beating of citizens that is important for us, not the organizations of the attackers and victims."

15. (U) Rosatom, the target of the environmentalists' protests, issued a statement condemning the attack, which read in part: "We are shocked with what happened and express condolences to the family of the activist who was killed... Rosatom hopes that law enforcement agencies will act quickly to solve this crime."

16. (U) Aleksandr Petrov of Human Rights Watch speculated to us July 23 that the attack was possibly motivated neither by neo-fascist sentiments nor the nuclear issue, but by hostility of the local police towards the demonstrators, following their unsuccessful attempt to search the camp premises. "The fact that the police have so quickly and unequivocally denied that these thugs had any nationalist or fascist ties suggests that they are either not serious about investigating this, or that they really do know because they have long-standing ties with the attackers." Petrov admitted that he had no evidence to support his suggestion that the police and the attackers may have collaborated.

Comment

17. (SBU) It is too early in the investigation to know who may have been behind the attack or, indeed, exactly what happened. Local environmental groups have rejected suggestions of some in law enforcement that robbery was the motive, while the police have been equally adamant that the perpetrators were not linked to right-wing groups. A demonstration in Angarsk, scheduled for the evening of July 23, was designed, according to Kozlov, both to mourn the loss of Bondarenko and keep the media's attention focused on local law enforcement's handling of the case.

MOSCOW 00003602 002.2 OF 002

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